

# Exploring the City: Perceiving Istanbul through its Cultural Productions

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## Abstract

*This essay explores the role of Istanbul's 'cultural productions' as components of the city's structure and texture. Istanbul is a city of tensions, generated by its countless conflicting and divergent flows which are constantly influenced by socio-economic, political and cultural fusions and confusions. It is constantly expanding, both horizontally and vertically, as evidenced by its central and peripheral settlements, illegal dwellings and squatted lands. With each and every new inhabitant, further cumulative cultural input is added to the city, which also blends social exclusion and transgression (together with axiomatic de facto regulations). The city 'operates' as a jumbled mode of excessive information; the repetitive collapse and replenishment of this information overload opens up diverse 'realities'. Within this picture, 'cultural productions' of the city have emerged as indicators of inhabitants' reactions, exposing ways of coping with/surviving in the city. These cultural productions are locally, temporarily and spontaneously produced. Consequently, this essay investigates how such cultural productions have been processed by the inhabitants of the city since the 1980s, and specifically focuses on the latest research and project models, navigating through projects undertaken by academics, artists and architects who correspond and have connections with international institutions — most notably in the field of contemporary art.*

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*The city flows in sequences. Impossible to capture, the only things slowing down the dazzling speed of these sequences are stories embedded in familiar coincidences. The city harbours endless stories. Each person that comes to the city has his/her own tale to tell: the city multiplies, becomes populated with stories; it never allows any story to settle, but simply continues to flow. The city creates a bizarre addiction in its simultaneously numbing and frenzied stimulating influence. In the city one is in constant flux and reflux, unable to position oneself on account of the effort required to stay incessantly alert while trying to perceive spaces, people, events.*

*The city flows. The desire to see the city as a whole is an improbable aspiration. It is impossible to get a grip on this unceasing city. It requires continuous effort to maintain the equilibrium to live, to perch on this ever-moving, ever-expanding monstrous beast. This creature is fertilized by those perching on it, thrives as it gives birth and feeds off its offspring. The end result of this weird mutation is unending crisis and bottlenecks occurring in its giant metabolism. New arteries climb like wild ivy over the clogged ones and cover up the freak underneath. It's hard to determine how much longer all of this — the vital energy of the beast — can last. But those who inhabit this agonized, huffing, puffing, odourous, flaring and bedazzling creature do not look as if they're going anywhere as long as there are still signs of life. Its addictive charm, its uncanny hypnotic*

*magnetism also draws in those from faraway lands. Intimacy with the beast, how long this intimacy lasts, who leaves who, all become entangled. People belong to this city insofar as they still have a story.*

*Stories about the city keep accumulating. Living in Istanbul resembles the excitement provoked by the impatient and ambiguous anticipation of finding a glittering box in a secluded corner of a deserted house. Once recklessly lived lives can at any moment find form, colour, embodiment. Things that easily escape the attention and experience of one person can come to constitute the whole life of another.*

*Stories continue to flow, leaving exposed traces through the city's memory. This city is so highly charged that the effort to infiltrate, to distinguish the details while trying to grasp the whole, the struggle to consume what is constantly produced becomes an inevitable and ongoing pursuit. Perhaps that is why the best shortcut to perceiving the city is through the verbal and written accumulations and experiences of others. The first step into seeing through the thousands of juxtaposed layers is to lend an ear to their stories.*

### **The mechanism: fabricating and activating cultural productions in/for the city**

Istanbul is an overpopulated city of spontaneous borders. It is a city of tension that comprises many conflicting divergent flows, which are constantly interrupted by the ruptures of socio-economic, political and cultural confusions. While overlapping and superimposing layers of cultural codes and productions are in constant conflict, they also absorb each other with tremendous speed. They all exist together and signify many things, thus never standing out on their own; they circulate within a sea of information by hinging on a multiplicity of references. The city operates as a jumbled mode of excessive information. The repetitive collapse and replenishment of this information overload opens up diverse 'realities'. These realities determine their own territories and fuse into the city through mobile information carriers (orally, visually and aurally). This mechanism is always at work, and only the act of transforming a reality (by utilizing and fabricating cultural productions for/from/with/in the city) into hyperstate stabilizes this process of self-production. Then labelling becomes easier. Labelling is a collective perception pattern in this city. Codification is only possible through collective labelling. Once labelling is realized, none of the city's inhabitants question the legitimacy of any cultural product.

### **The recent invasion and transformation**

Since the end of the second world war, Istanbul has experienced massive immigration from rural areas — initially coming from the north and later (during the 1990s) from the southeast of the country. The migrants' main motivation was economic, as private investment favoured Istanbul and a few other large cities at the expense of the rest of Anatolia. With the arrival of so many migrants, the rapidly increasing population settled in illegal housing, appropriating unoccupied (mostly state-owned) land. These settlements are called '*gecekondu*' (meaning 'landed overnight'). This was a massive invasion, driven by a pressing need for accommodation.

For the last five decades, governments have construed this phenomenon as progress and as a short-termed self-sustainable financial model, owing to the fact that it provides a form of social security and financial aid for urbanization (Keyder, 2000: 182). The city has perceptibly started to expand into a giant organism unfettered by urban planning. Furthermore, allowing the illegal housing process to continue, and promises relating to

infrastructure and land-tenure issues given by politicians to the *gecekondu* owners during elections, have always been a means to obtain more votes.

Such a model has been successful in the context of informal self-service urbanization; ‘the city within decades experienced some kind of “urbanization offering profit sharing” for comparatively many, especially for early arrivals’ (Esen, 2005: 1). In addition, the model was practical for ‘the provision of housing, safety, and protection from inflation. Until 1980, the process remained relatively free of superordinate governmental regimentation or from capitalist interventions’ (*ibid.*). At this point, Şengül (2001: 109) points out a shift first to ‘mafia-like client networks’, and then to ‘urbanization of capital’ with the arrival of the post-1980 neoliberal period, as socio-spatial conflicts in the city became more apparent.

These illegal settlements have also been subject to social tension, especially since the 1980s. Ideological, religious and ethnic segregations have caused conflicts whenever a settlement comprised overlapping segregations (Kongar, 1998: 580). Yet the city texture has constantly been shaped (through various flows and breaks during each decade) by economic, social and cultural changes and degradations — political terrorism followed by three *coup d’état* events, armed clashes in southeastern Anatolia between PKK guerrillas and Turkish forces, the post-1980 transition to a neoliberal economy, and finally the rise of politicized Islam (starting with local elections in the 1990s, to broader success in the general election of 2002). Due to these changes and degradations, the city itself has become a manifestation of constant cultural schizophrenia, fed by conflicts between East and West, secularism and fundamental Islam, Left and Right, nationalism and separatism.

In addition to its illegal settlements, the city has expanded prodigiously since 1990, with the development of shopping and entertainment centres, industrial estates, business districts, highways, private universities and satellite settlements. The extent of illegal housing has increased immensely, including in districts where multi-storey buildings and business skyscrapers have been going up. According to statistics, 70% of the urban housing stock is illegal or has only recently acquired legalized status (Sönmez, 1996: 140). At present, migrants far outnumber the indigenous inhabitants of Istanbul.

The 1999 earthquake and the deep recession of 2001–02 intensified the reverse migration from the city and brought the building sector to a standstill, which still persists. Moreover, as real estate prices fell, the quantitative overproduction of living space of past decades took effect.

With the transition to post-*gecekondu*, the real estate price of the *gecekondus* came to the fore . . . The former *gecekondu* signals its agreement, having sealed itself off under the hegemony of the middle class . . . The wild transition to post-*gecekondu*, particularly the modalities of the second wave of land-taking, took place in exclusion of the old middle classes and the educated circles (Esen, 2005: 5–6).

During the 1990s, the term *gecekondu* began to be replaced by ‘*varos*’ (with negative connotations). The term simply implies culturally and politically marginalized people who are unable to adapt to modern urban life.

The *varos* is now a perfect culprit for anything the middle class is worried about: deficient quality in buildings and the associated earthquake risks, colonization of water reserves, pollution, infrastructural shortcomings, rural machismo and discrimination of women, the mafia. Never before have the intra-urban boundary lines been so clear-cut: On the one hand are the *apartman* milieu — outwardly politically correct and cosmopolitan, always voting left-national, often impoverished; on the other, there’s the post-*gecekondu* milieu — seeking to safeguard its economic status, consisting of people increasingly likely to see themselves as an Istanbulite, and always voting for right-wing (with Islamic, liberal, and conservative undertones) or Kurdish-leftist (e.g. Gazi) parties. These two antagonists aggressively strive for a dominance of their respective cultural code of conduct in public space (*ibid.*: 6).

## Divergent flows: the inhabitants

The city constantly expands both horizontally and vertically, as evidenced by its central and peripheral settlements, illegal dwellings and squatted lands. Although the city has a fragmented and diverse society profile with multiple segregations, the inhabitants of the city are forced to overlap into each others' territory. With each and every new inhabitant, further cumulative cultural input is added to the city, which also blends social exclusion and transgression (together with axiomatic *de facto* regulations).

There is no defined unifying system in place to operate as a social contract in the city. The interaction of the classes is based on power struggles.<sup>1</sup> Thereby, *de facto* regulations determined by individuals have become the substitute for systematized rules.<sup>2</sup>

Accordingly, the city operates through its own self-produced rules which are unstable and totally arbitrary. Each rule signifies a shortcoming and/or error in the system. Yet, these malfunctioning aspects legitimize themselves through oral, visual and aural representations in the social and cultural realms of the city.

Within this picture, 'cultural productions' of the city have emerged as indicators of reactions, exposing ways of coping with/surviving in the city. These cultural productions are locally, temporarily and spontaneously produced. They conflict with each other in many layers, and they fuse into the layers of the city in every sense.

## Arabesk and after – cultural productions: indicators of inhabitants' defence mechanisms

With the process of internal migration during the 1980s and 1990s, cultural productions were generated within the 'Arabesk'<sup>3</sup> culture, a reaction against a nationalist-state elite dependent on Western paradigms. This was the popular culture associated with the *gecekondu* inhabitants, who found themselves stranded between rural and urban worlds. Arabesk culture was the expression of their 'otherness', frustration, feelings of alienation and loneliness in the city context. Musical manifestations of Arabesk culture were banned on state-owned Turkish Radio and Television for a long time, when TRT held the exclusive monopoly on radio and television broadcasting.

In the early 1990s, state policy (which had shifted to a neoliberal stance) dictated a cultural change, with the increased prevalence of individualism, atomization, depoliticization and the hegemony of economic reason. Parallel to this development, in 1990, President and former Prime Minister Turgut Özal announced that private foreign broadcasters could transmit programmes to Turkey via satellite (despite a constitutional ban on private broadcasting which propped up TRT). Özal's son founded Turkey's first private TV station, which began broadcasting from Germany. Soon countless stations followed, broadcasting via satellite from abroad. Since then, TV has not only become a social phenomenon in Turkey, it has also functioned as the distributor and promoter of various popular-cultural productions of big cities — especially in the case of Istanbul. Today, there is approximately one television (receiving at least 40 channels) for every house in Turkey. This is one more step towards Baudrillard's (1983) conception of

1 Especially after the shift to a neoliberal economy, which caused a radical change with emerging values orbited around free-market-based immorality (e.g. earning money quickly by cheating and/or surviving through bribery).

2 Despite universal rules (and the police as the authority and guarantor for applying these rules), the operational 'logic' of Istanbul traffic is a vivid example of this substitution.

3 'Arabesk' (French, arabesque; Italian, arabesco), 'made or done in the Arabic fashion', refers to a complex, ornate design of intertwining foliate or geometrical figures used for ornamentation. Yet it is a cultural phenomenon of Turkish society to emphasize the low-quality of such art and lifestyle. 'Arabesk' first emerged as a type of popular music, a new hybrid genre which originated at the peripheries of big cities at the end of the 1960s. It is always labelled as the culture of the Other.

hyperreality; because of the economic crisis and social burdens caused by poor living standards and lack of social welfare, inhabitants of the city tend to live life vicariously, via TV. Furthermore, because of the uncertain political situation over the last few decades (with a series of coalitions), people have long since lost faith in politics in general. This torpor also explains the sedative influence of TV and the printed media in Turkey.

Today, the term 'Arabesk' has largely faded away, but the continuation of Arabesk culture is reflected in many TV programmes. Weekdays are scheduled with 'women-oriented' forum programmes (designed with a strong emphasis on the 'kitsch' musical and visual elements that are a legacy of this culture) in which inhabitants' problems are discussed, and prime-time is shaped by a schedule of 'Televole'<sup>4</sup> programmes. TV is thus one of the most efficient tools to discover, label and promote the emerging cultural productions of the city.

Through both their formats and content, such TV programmes have also been indicators of the cultural and social changes in the city brought about by migrants. A very notable example to have been processed by TV programmes is the 'Kebab Culture': Istanbul, once a city of seafood and Ottoman cuisine, was introduced to small kebab restaurants by migrants from eastern and southeastern Anatolia during the late 1980s and 1990s; these restaurants then spread all over the city by upgrading themselves into luxurious restaurants and franchising kebab houses. This culture is not solely linked to the food industry; it also signifies social and moral values, traditions, behavioural codes and cultural diversity.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the reinforcing of Arabesk culture through music, in tandem with large-scale production and consumption of illegal music cassettes, brought with it certain intriguing elements: the Arabesk aesthetics of kitsch ornaments and stickers placed in public transportation vehicles run by private (migrant) operators; films in which vulnerability, cultural and social dilemmas in the big city — together with the constant reminder of the temporality of being away from home — were all reflected through 'innocent and talented' child singers and the heavy lyrics of their songs. Such cultural productions have been indicators of the defence mechanisms developed to survive in/with the city. Yet, these productions also signify the confusion of private and public (both physically and culturally) in the city. According to Yalvac (2003: 24):

Arabesk provided a space for the cultural negotiation between the changing domains of private and public. The private lives of these labour migrants from the southeast of the country, a backward and primitive site of Turkey, had been shaken by the separation from their native lands and milieus. The self-destructive and negative mood of the emotional sphere was publicly displayed in the city's space. City space provoked and promoted the traumatic encounters of those migrants . . . It functioned as a melodramatic experience in the process of attaining a new identity congruous with new parameters.

Created by the uncontrollable urbanization process of Istanbul, Arabesk culture is not the only problem to emerge from the identity crisis shared by both old and new inhabitants. The problematic issue of Turkish national identity springs from the same source. Yalvac (*ibid.*) refers to Arabesk as 'a strong metaphor for the problematic national identity of Turkey':

Turkey's national identity — a colonized identity in resistance — dependent on Western paradigms, was subjected to a permanent, impossible search for recognition from the 'civilized' West. The Turkish nation, since the Kemalist regime, was subjected to a radical

4 'Televole' is the generic term for a popular hybrid type of TV programme, based on paparazzi culture and football magazine news. Televole programmes primarily dwell upon the lavish lifestyles of celebrities in Istanbul together with reports on the Turkish football scene. The popularity of these programmes is evidence of the high demand for urban popular culture as manifested by the Arabesk cultural phenomenon. This kind of broadcasting is harshly criticized by intellectuals for promoting degenerating social values.

fragmentation from its Islamic, Ottoman and even Turkish roots. Arabesk was a reaction to this cultural shift in the historical consciousness. It described a social reality that fit neither the ideal traditional (Eastern), nor the modern (Western) forms, relationships, practices nor values. The unfulfillable search for recognition from developed countries, as well as the search for unity and authenticity, forced us into exoticizing ourselves. In endless debates of what is and what is not Turkish culture, we struggled for a national identity through sophisticated versions of Arabesk.

In the 1980s, a huge chasm began to open between Leftist intellectuals and any kind of cultural input derived from Arabesk culture, a phenomenon signifying the distance between the public and intellectuals who look to Western cultural paradigms. With the passage of time, these two poles have started to pose ironic situations, scenes and statements.

### Post-1990 productions within the urban contingent culture

Reflecting on the city, it is possible to identify several 'planned production' cultural models:

- 1 The reaction by Leftist intellectuals and artists against the *varos* culture (i.e. the legacy of Arabesk culture) and the cultural policy of the state — which began to blend with more recent state policy and media influence;
- 2 Alternative productions by a younger generation reacting to the urban contingent culture which developed post-1990; and
- 3 Research and projects by academics, artists and architects who correspond and have connections with international institutions — especially in the field of contemporary art.

The first model has been prominent as a result of productions processed and developed for festivals, and activities organized by cultural institutions and several universities in Istanbul. Istanbul Modern Art Museum, the Jazz, Film and Theatre Festivals of the Istanbul Foundation for Art and Culture, Akbank Jazz Festival, Borusan Music Activities, Mimar Sinan University's art-related exhibitions and activities, Rezan Has Museum and other museums and exhibition spaces belonging to Kadir Has University are all prominent examples worth mentioning.

The second model seems to have nearly completed its life cycle, linked as it was to the visual and aural representations and productions of a generation that found itself following in the wake of two well-documented generations — those of the early 1970s (who were highly politicized, and suffered as a result thereof) and the late 1980s (the 'sleeping generation', that has been totally apolitical). A breakdown of this cacophonous, yet treasure-like subcultural mass reveals the suppressed resisting mechanisms of the period, veiled with black humour and parody. They were subsequently poisoned by the Arabesk culture and political repression of the state; trivialized by daily violence, overpopulation and the extreme imbalance between levels of income; by the explosion of visual broadcasting and its nauseating effects on popular culture; by the friction produced by dysfunctional traffic and the corrupted political scene of the 1980s. They were subsequently drained of this poison during the 1990s, in a spectrum of visual and audio cultural productions, as well as through comics, magazines, fanzines and stickers.

One of this generation's leading names was ZeN, a pioneering band on the Istanbul alternative music scene which fused energies taken from various radical movements of the modern era such as dada, punk and psychedelic, together with Sufi transcendentalism, Turkish folk music, gypsy tunes, historical and contemporary music embedded in the city's memory. Likewise, Serhat Köksal (also known as 2/5 BZ) has been making audiotapes, photocopy fanzines, stickers, CDs, flyers, posters and video

cut-up collage works drawing on 1970s and 1980s Turkish melodrama and action films, political propaganda and media imagery of social phenomena. Performing with tapes, samplers, saz, darbouka, electronics, drums, vocals and the spoken word, he blends the city's diverse cultural productions. The style varies from traditional music incorporating experimental electronic sounds, to improvisation with elements that stem from Turkish cinema.

Today, another type of cultural production has fused itself within the layers of the city. Constituting the third model, these productions are still progressing through research and projects by academics, artists and architects who correspond and have connections with international institutions — especially in the field of contemporary art. They consider the city as a kind of laboratory, providing all kinds of data to be processed within the framework of other disciplines. The basis for their research is the city's polyphonic cultural structure, while the fast flow of life covers the historical and geographical characteristics of the city with borrowed images. The rapid pace of life operates in-sync with the schizophrenic amalgamation of techno-surreal imagery, sterile and hygienic giant shopping malls, nightclubs with cut-and-paste decors, crowded centres, districts of the rich and also the poor with anarchic street aesthetics, skyscrapers and overlapped historic references.

Two early projects representing good examples within this context are the *K34* project by Ceren Oykut and Selda Asal (Apartment Project, October 2004), and the *Istatistiklal* project by Ertug Uçar, Simge Göksoy and Erhan Muratoglu (ZKM, April–August 2004).

The *K34* project forms a fragmented landscape, the result of visual research through an urban-based narration with new-media art. Selda Asal, who works primarily with video to explore ways of documenting visual memory vignettes, collaborates with Ceren Oykut for this project. Oykut's drawings also take daily life experiences in the city — mostly 'Istanbul' — as the setting of her works. Her drawings create plastic realities through mundane details of life in the company of visual rhetoric. These drawings take part in multidisciplinary projects concentrating on Istanbul's sounds and culture. Throughout its plot organization, the whole project encapsulates the city as a subject to be discovered within a room. Cross projectors display sequences, which come together to form statements about the aspects of the eclectic and polyphonic situations and conditions of the city's cultural texture.

The *Istatistiklal* project was one of the products of research into an Istanbul thoroughfare called Istiklal, executed using video projection, sound, and photography and documentation material installations. Istiklal Caddesi (Avenue) functions as the spine of Istanbul, with lots of aberrations all its own, yet mirroring the whole city: one could follow the city's life-flow on an axis starting from Tünel, running to Taksim Square. It is an amalgamation of obscure passageways, kitsch decors, anarchic street aesthetics, techno-surreal imagery, storefront galleries, smoky cafes, seedy bars, sweetshops, trendy stores, second-hand bookstores, forbidding doorways, seedy nightclubs and historic buildings, all passed by the old and overloaded tram service.

The city treats its guests well by sprinkling a seductive shower of hospitality over all its layers. Nonetheless, once the city detects its own inhabitants, it starts to practice the most puzzling survival games on them. Yet, there are ways and modes of survival: in 2002, a group of people with a subliminal motivation to overcome the survival game of the city (architects and students from various universities) started a project called *Istatistiklal*.

In the beginning, the project had no definite duration, no strategy and no goal at all. The drive was to define an enigmatic organism through a scientific methodology; quite simply by counting. Armed with statistically based methods of analysis and urban research, the team began its investigation, only to find that the city constantly dictated new modes of analysis. The more they analysed and counted, the more they were drawn to alternative methods of recording and counting. The more they counted, the more they revealed the signs displaying the enigmatic entity of the city. They counted all the quantities necessary to give a sum of a whole number, they then developed new technologies and methods to

count qualitative things: flowerpots, steps, vehicles, persons, gestures, habits and so on. They merely added new features and layers to the survival game of the city. All these features dissolved within the fast pace of urban life as the system relentlessly hacked at itself, with each and every viable interference being easily and rapidly absorbed in the process. After accumulating hundreds of maps, graphics, charts, drawings, photographs and texts, they came up with a mass of information on, for example, 'surveillance: how we are being watched', 'consumption: how we eat', 'on pedestrians: how we walk and are challenged while cruising along this axis' and finally 'numbers: what we are in terms of figures for Istiklal and for this giant organism'.

In keeping with the very nature of this game, the project has ended up with a variety of exits. Each exit has brought about another production as different players of the game present evidence in different ways, adding up to the work in progress which is the project. Among the by-products that were developed by Ertug Uçar, Simge Göksoy and Erhan Muratoglu were a publication, exhibitions, talks, design productions and video works.

Correspondingly, the Ninth International Istanbul Biennial, co-curated by Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun, focused on the city of Istanbul itself; thus, the outcome of the biennial, along with the research, evaluation and production processes, was to contribute further new cultural productions to the city. Included was Iranian artist Solmaz Shahbazi's project *Untitled (2005)*: it focused on gated communities in Istanbul, through interviews with residents, non-residents and social scientists on the topic of sprawl. Tan (2005) interprets this work as 'the reproduction of a community whose gaze re-defines the other of the city', and so addresses 'a community of "the urban poor, refugees and ethnic groups", which is based on the network of relationships', but who do not define themselves as inhabitants of Istanbul.

Following on from these examples, many other projects taking Istanbul as the basis of their research and process (especially with reference to the city's international links) have subsequently been developed by artist initiatives such as NOMAD, Hafriyat, Oda Project and Apartment Project, and institutions such as santralistanbul, Garajistanbul and Depo.

I would like to conclude with two recent examples: the *Istanbul Complaints Choir* (2009–10) by CUMA, and the *Free Fall Istanbul Project* (2010) by the Apartment Project.

The *Istanbul Complaints Choir* (part of the *Complaints Choir* project initiated by artists Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen) was assembled thanks to an announcement made by Istanbul-based CUMA (Contemporary Utopia Management). *Istanbul Complaints Choir* gathered people of various ages, social and occupational backgrounds and performed the music of renowned composer Michael Ellison. The lyrics for the *Istanbul Complaints Choir* were written during a three-week complaints workshop in Istanbul.

The Apartment Project conducted a 15-day workshop entitled the *Free Fall Istanbul Project*, which collated documentation of everyday life in Istanbul through writings, images, sounds, texts and the life-affecting dynamics of each artist. The end result was composed of interactively shared materials, presented and discussed throughout a series of panels, and an exhibition at the Apartment Project Space.

All these art practices executed over the last decade may be perceived as a logbook of the city's development. Hence, they could in future provide remarkable data regarding the off-the-record social and cultural dynamics of the city.

## Conclusion

If one's choice and/or commitment is to live in this giant enigmatic organism, then one should develop strategies to understand and to survive in Istanbul. In this context, dealing with art praxis or revising cultural productions through their ideological implications



can offer perspectives for exploring and coping with the city. They can at least provide an insight into understanding tensional intersections among Istanbul's countless segregations, and propose possibilities for living together, despite all the mental blocks and boundaries.

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## Résumé

*Cet essai examine le rôle des 'productions culturelles' d'Istanbul en tant que composantes de la structure et de la texture urbaines. Cette ville est faite de tensions générées par un nombre infini de flux contradictoires et divergents, influencés en permanence par des fusions et confusions socio-économiques, politiques et culturelles. Elle ne cesse de se développer tant au plan horizontal que vertical, comme le montrent ses implantations centrales et périphériques, ses habitats illégaux et ses terrains squattés. Chaque nouvel habitant apporte une contribution culturelle cumulative à la ville qui mélange également exclusion sociale et transgression (ainsi que des règles axiomatiques de fait). La ville 'fonctionne' comme un enchevêtrement d'informations excessives: l'effondrement et la reconstitution réitérés de cette surcharge d'informations révèlent diverses 'réalités'. Dans cette représentation, les 'productions culturelles' de la ville sont apparues comme des indicateurs des réactions des habitants, traduisant leurs manières d'affronter la ville et d'y survivre. Les modalités de ces productions sont locales, temporaires et spontanées. L'étude s'intéresse donc au traitement de ces productions culturelles par les habitants depuis les années 1980, et porte en particulier sur les modèles de recherches et de projets les plus récents, en passant par des travaux d'universitaires, d'artistes ou d'architectes qui correspondent et ont des liens avec des institutions internationales, notamment dans le domaine de l'art contemporain.*